**My Word**

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*A besotted* ***Anna Krien*** *explains why she’s not ready to part with her old panel van – with its hand-painted exterior and wooden chandelier inside – just yet.*

It was my granny’s last wish that I get rid of that car. I said, “Granny, I love my car.” I thought it was a bit manipulative to use a dying wish on my poor defenceless V8 mag-wheel bench seat 1978 Holden panel van. I tried to negotiate. “Granny, I won’t get another tattoo, or any new holes in my face and I’ll keep my hair the one colour from now on, but I’m not getting rid of the panel van. Deal?” My granny sighed and turned away from me. She closed her eyes and pretended to be asleep. When her dinner came, she wouldn’t let me help her eat it and the nurse cut the meat into little pieces instead.

I paint my panel van with house paint. Every few years, a splattered outline around the car is left on the street like the chalk outline of a dead body in a homicide. Which is interesting because a new boyfriend seems to coincide with each paint job. My Italian boyfriend’s mother says that in the seventies people used to paint everything with house paint – the car, the footpath, even the fridge. At the moment, my panel van is two-tone green and the inside, including the dash, is wallpapered. A little wooden chandelier hangs from the ceiling. But many people, not just my granny, don’t like my car.

Children love it but their parents hate it. I’m not sure why – my car is not fast and if I’ve drunk too much, I slip in the back and sleep til morning. But in St Kilda a grumpy man kept letting the tyres down, and in Fitzroy North, a neighbour tried to get the council to ban me from parking in front of her house. Unfortunately for her, my housemate was a town planner with the very same municipality. However one evening, when I was getting out of my car – she stopped me to say, “You’re rental scum aren’t you? My husband and I worked hard to buy this house.” I was speechless.

I wonder if she would be a different person if she experienced what I’ve experienced in this car. Six friends crammed in it at the Coburg Drive-in or sleeping on a pristine beach in Kangaroo Island with a mosquito net thrown over the back, a moody stereo that only plays certain AM radio stations, playing scrabble on a sandy mattress, snuggled in the bench seat next to your lover never feeling the need to get anywhere fast – meaning the panel van has never directly killed an animal (although I’m sure its carbon footprint has). So far, it has stopped for three wombats, one goanna, five echidnas, an emu and her three knock-kneed kids, a fox and too many kangaroos to count.

But if it’s the gentrified city residents that give me grief, it’s the mechanics that bend over backwards to keep the panel van going forward. They rummage through wrecking yards for rare parts and continually re-weld sheets of metal beneath the pedals where the road is revealing itself. The mechanics with their greasy rags and my insufficient funds, we know that we are gazing at the last of its kind. When I was growing up, my parents had two Leyland P76s – one green and one orange. I’m sure our childhoods took about three times longer than usual with those long Malibu-esque vehicles, especially when they overheated halfway up a mountain road. But there is something about not travelling in a vacuum-sealed modern car – when it is hot, you open the windows and when it is cold, well, you stay awake.

Last week, someone left a note on my windscreen, requesting I move the car and the handwriting was the exact same illegible scrawl that my Granny had, the kind where the person had been taught writing on tablets in 1932 and never graduated to the ball point pen. I obeyed immediately.